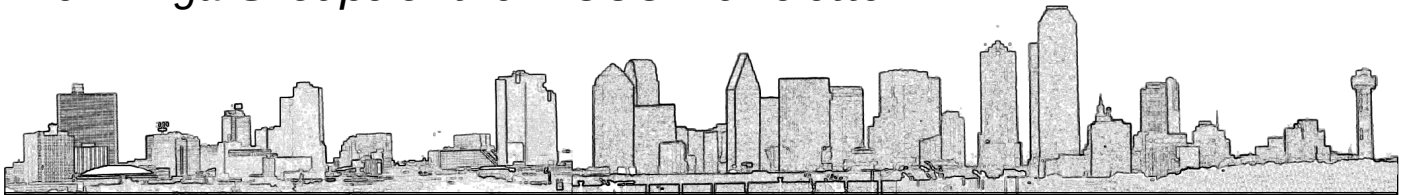


The AGM Journal

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Removable Media

A Look At History and What's There Now

By Johnny C. Kitchens

Removable media seems to have been a part of the computer since the very beginning of computers. There just seems to be a need to transfer data, save it separately, or backup needed data in some way. Since the beginning, all sorts of removable media have come and gone. Punch cards were the early form to fill this need. It lacked an important feature in that it was not rewritable. Punch cards would have been a failure in the home market as well and the reader is big and noisy! The first usable removable media has to be the tape drive. With the tape drive, we finally got a drive that is portable, rewritable, and economical. Since most of these were based on cheap cassette drives, and the cassette was already an established audio medium, cost of the tape drives were lower than other alternatives. Tape drives have slowly evolved into high capacity backup devices, moving out of the mainstream because of what they lacked... speed.

While backing up a computer can be a "start it and forget it" type of operation, random file access is another thing altogether. The first successful removable media, would have to be the 5.25 inch floppy. There were several size variations, but the 5.25 inch floppy made the grade. This format has dictated the future of removable media ever since it came out. While it became the defacto standard and went through one upgrade after another, it was what it lacked that pointed the way for future formats. The disk and its housing are flexible and this did little to protect the media from damage from bending. Protection from contamination is minimal. Capacity peaked at 1.2MB and it still was not small enough to put in your pocket. The fact that the drives and disk are still offered today is proof that they were a success.

What followed were several attempts to overcome these deficiencies. A miniature version of the 5.25 showed up, but failed to get rid of the flexible housing. A 3.5 and 3 inch hard shell floppy media showed up. These addressed just about everything 5.25 lacked. The hard-shell addressed

the media flexing. A sliding cover addressed the dust and dirt problem. The smaller size made it drop right into a pocket. Improved density meant greater capacity and write protection was just a switch away! The 3.5 inch won this war. Their capacity has steadily increased with HD (High Density) being the popular peak. A 2.88MB ED version was introduced a few years ago, but it did not catch on. A 10MB floptical version appeared that was compatible with existing formats (not Amiga) but failed to catch on and faded away. While the HD 3.5 inch floppy has become a standard in the PC and Macintosh with its 1.44MB capacity, a lack of drives has kept it from being a standard, with its 1.76MB capacity, on the Amiga. A real shame.

Since the development of the 3.5 inch floppy, other forms of removable media have come and gone. The first big winner in the market: SyQuest's 44MB and later 88MB drives. These offered huge capacity, compared to any floppy at the time, and speed nearing those of hard drives. One feature held them back, cost! I remember wanting one after seeing it in operation, but even used it was too expensive. SyQuest steadily increased capacity, but the price never seemed to come down. Nevertheless, it continued to be a success and, as we will see, an inspiration.

While the floppies and SyQuest were busily getting things sorted out, another format came seemingly out of nowhere. The CD-ROM seemed like the perfect format to the industry, but less so to the public. The same argument that held the Laser Disc and the audio CD back was being used to argue against the CD-ROM. You cannot make your own! The audio CD survived due to superior audio performance. The one thing CD-ROM had going for it, capacity, would be its savior. Programs were getting bigger, and the cost of putting them on floppies was detrimental to user pocket books... plus the time of swapping all of those disks. The CD-ROM's capacity of 650MB and the development of faster drives worked together to insure the acceptance of the format. Speed actually became a bigger complaint than

being able to write one. They seemed to be slower than floppies in the early days. Then the speed wars started... each manufacturer claiming faster and faster drives. Designating speed increases with rating of how fast they were versus the original speed, the 2X being twice as fast as the original. Today they are up to 32X. Most of these are only their rated speed during a small portion of the time. Most seem to be only equivalent to 8X. I tested one 24X that ran the rated speed for a short time, then dropped to around 8.9X for a very long time. Finally it dropped to around 4X. The average for the whole run turned out to be 8.2X.

A variation of CD-ROM killed another complaint. CD-R gives your average user the ability to create their own CDs! The advantage of that becomes even more apparent with the huge acceptance of the CD-ROM. After creating a CD, you can put it in just about every computer being sold today. A drawback — once these disks are written, that's it... you cannot change it. Worse yet, make a mistake and you wasted time and material. The drives and media have dropped in price nicely, increasing their popularity. A new development CD-RW allows you to write to the disk as needed, as well as make changes, and correct errors. To increase disk capacity even further, a new format, DVD has made an appearance. It starts out at 4.7GB with promises of increased capacity, DVD-R, and DVD-RW are coming soon.

While all of this development was going on, another type of removable seemed to be making its way out of sight. Magneto Optical drives were on their way to making inroads on tape backup market. Huge capacity with random access were in their favor, but high price made them out of reach for most. They were also slow. The media for Magneto Optical boasted several advantages: long shelf life, and it could not be erased by a magnetic field! A breakthrough came about with the introduction of the 3.5 inch format. The disks are the size of two 3.5 inch floppies stacked. An initial capacity of 128MB packed a lot of data in a small space. The drives were a bit pricey, but the media seemed reasonable in comparison. The price of the drives and media have dropped steadily, while increasing capacity. The 3.5 format can be had in 128, 230, 540, and 610MB with the price of disk ranging from \$4 to \$50. Nothing else comes close in media price.

I am sure that several companies must have noticed the need of users for a manageable, large capacity, and cost effective means of storing files, hard drive backup, and transferring large files between systems. Taking notice of SyQuest's dominance of the removable media and the inconvenience of tape backup, the right hardware could be a big success.

The most recent surge in removable media popularity and developments comes on the heels of the IOmega Zip drive. The Zip drive offered reasonable amounts of storage at a low price, and it looked like the next thing in storage. Its popularity spurred manufacturers to include the drive in their computers. Still other companies licensed the technologies to make their own version. Competition was bound to come out after this kind of success. IOmega followed the 100MB Zip with a 1GB Jaz drive. IOmega seemed to be in control of the removable market. SyQuest sent forth two challengers to the Zip. Neither of these seemed to make a dent in the IOmega market. IOmega's

seemed to have everything right initially, but they seem to falter on a follow through. The price of drives and media have yet to drop since introduction, and the Zip is still 100MB despite rumors of a 200MB version.

A drive called LS-120 has begun to enter the Zip drive domain. This drive is compatible with previous

3.5 inch floppies while offering 120MB on a special disk. Continuing with that idea comes a new version called HiFD. It works like the LS-120, but offers 240MB and speed similar to hard drives. Sony is behind this drive and many see it as the future of the floppy. Several companies have already announced support for the drive. This means little 'til we see the results.

Competition for the Jaz drive has come by way of SyQuest. The SyJet is SyQuest's first success in several failed attempts to foil IOmega... offering a full 1.5GB capacity for less cost than the Jaz's 1GB. This has spurred SyQuest to introduce the SparQ drive. This 1 GB drive costs the same as the Zip and the disks cost less. They followed that with the announcement of a 4.7GB capacity drive... the same capacity as the DVD. IOmega has not been totally idle. They have improved the Zip drive some and they now have a 2GB version of the Jaz. The Jaz, SyJet, CD, and DVD lack one thing. They cannot be carried in a shirt pocket, and it is recommended that they be carried in their containers to protect them as they are a bit fragile. The Zip disks also have trouble fitting in pockets. Backward compatibility is another problem some see as plaguing removable media. Availability of the disk should be the main worry! Being able to share disks is another consideration. What do your friends have?

If you have a mountain of floppies that is increasing on a regular basis, and you need regular access to them, a removable media drive could save you lots of time and money in the long run. Media with 100MB capacity could hold the equivalent of 70 HD floppies. Use compression and you could pack over 100 on it. Look at what 1GB of capacity could offer! You just have to decide on an internal or external version of your choice. Enjoy!!! AGM

To increase disk capacity even further, a new format, DVD has made an appearance. It starts out at 4.7GB with promises of increased capacity

The Hombre

An Interview with Dr. Edward L. Hepler
Conducted by Vidar Langberget

Vidar: Could you tell us something about yourself, your education and your employment history, etc.?

Dr. Hepler: I have a BS, MS, and PhD, all in Electrical Engineering and all from Drexel University in Philadelphia, PA. I joined Bell Lab's after school and spent about 7 years in their Naperville, Ill. (Indian Hill) Facility. That facility was used to design all of the electronic switching systems for AT&T (before it was split up) and the fault tolerant computers which drove them. I was involved in the design of the 3B20, 3B5 and 3B2 computers. A couple of them became commercial products of AT&T after the split. I was also involved with the specification and design of part of the BellMAC-32, an early 32-bit microprocessor developed at Bell Labs.

From Bell Labs, I moved on to General Electric where I spent about 5 years. This was in their SpaceCraft Digital Processor department. GE made communications satellites and we did processors of various types for them.

I next moved to Commodore where I worked on the AAA architecture and was responsible for the Andrea chip. Andrea was the Agnes/Alice equivalent for AAA. Andrea was far more sophisticated than Agnes/Alice. It had a microcoded processor (very RISC like) built in to do coordinate arithmetic, etc. Much of the line draw arithmetic, clipping, etc., was done in hardware on Andrea... The last couple of years, I reported to the VP of Engineering and was responsible for the architecture of next generation Amigas. In that role, I performed various studies including one which would have produced a single chip Amiga (Motorola MC680x0 core, plus AA logic), and early versions of Hombre which contained a SIMD processor for graphics, etc. The last study became the Hombre and design was started.

I now have my own company, VLS Concepts, which does Architecture (System and VLSI), design, and CAD work.

Vidar: What is the Hombre, and what was your involvement with it?

Dr. Hepler: Hombre was to be the next generation Amiga. I did the architecture, did a set of C-level cycle-correct models to perform performance simulations, then did M models (a Mentor Graphics proprietary hardware description language) to synthesize the control logic. Other M models described the data paths and I had a couple of engineers starting to do transistor level design of them.

Hombre was to be a complete system in two chips. The first chip was the CPU chip and contained a RISC integer core, a blitter, a 3D colour rendering engine, audio,

a CD interface, a peripheral interface, a bus interface and controllers for display and system memories. The second chip was the video data path and contained line buffers, a colour lookup table, etc.

The chip set was designed so that with minimal external chips (ROM, DRAM) a complete low-end system could be built. This low end system would be adequate for a game console like CD-32 (CD-64) or a set top box. With the addition of an ASIC (which connected to the peripheral interface), a low-end computer (like the A1200) was produced.

When an external processor was added, the Hombre chip set became a peripheral processor and off-loaded the main processor so it could be more useful doing OS and user tasks. The chip set could also be configured to be "slaves" on a peripheral card and therefore could become a graphics plug-in for any platform.

Internally, it had 64-bit datapaths. Externally, it could be configured to use 32-bit memory (in low cost (and lower performance)) configurations, or 64-bit memory in higher performance configurations. Both used the same chip, but bonded into different packages.

Vidar: What 3D features did it have?

Dr. Hepler: It supported Gouraud shading and texture mapping in hardware. It could shade or map trapezoids... Pixel sizes ranged from 4-bit to 24-bits.

It did most of the rendering steps in hardware and supported non-linear shading and mapping... One of the software engineers did a simulation of the texture mapping algorithm which wrapped an angel-fish picture around the inside and outside of a rotating cylinder. It was pretty impressive and did the perspective mapping quite nicely.

Vidar: What kind of sound system did it have?

Dr. Hepler: I planned on taking some of the sound circuitry from AAA to produce basic audio. But I planned on changing the output format to that of digital CD (BCLK, LRCLK, DATA) to use commercially available amplifiers. There were two CD channels in and a method of combining the audio. This allowed external audio chips (DSP style) to be placed on the peripheral interface and be merged with the Hombre generated audio. It also allowed audio from MPEG decoders to be merged with Hombre generated audio.

Vidar: Would the Hombre be PAL/NTSC compatible?

Dr. Hepler: Yes. We were also monitoring the movement of HDTV and were planning on making it as compat-



ible as possible. Of course, in hindsight, we would have had to make some changes as the HDTV standards still seem to be moving.

Vidar: Would features like the copper, scrolling and sprite support be included?

Dr. Hepler: Yes and no. A copper like structure was there. Scrolling was supported. I talked to enough people to realize that many game developers were unhappy with the sprite hardware. Most said that 8 sprites were not enough. Most also said that the collision detection hardware was inadequate. No matter how many sprites I would have put in hardware, someone would have wanted at least one more. So I put in no sprite hardware, but put in some blitter modes which made generating scenes with software sprites very easy. There was really only one hardware sprite, for a cursor.

Vidar: What resolutions would the Hombre offer? For games?

Dr. Hepler: It would go up to 1280 x 1024. Perhaps more interesting was that it supported 4 playfields (at lower resolutions)... And each playfield could be a different style of display. For example, one playfield could be HAM (for a very nice background) while others could use the colour lookup tables.

Vidar: How long do you think it would take to finish it?

Dr. Hepler: The development schedule at the time was 18 months long for both hardware and software. We were part-way through it when things fell apart. The schedule was planned such that Hombre equipped games-machines (CD-64) would have been available for the Christmas '95 season.

Vidar: How do you think the Hombre would compare to the current consoles and 3D cards for the PC, not to mention AAA?

Dr. Hepler: I believe that it would have been competitive with any of the game consoles currently available. Some of the PC 3D graphics chips have probably pulled ahead, but they are targeting a different market. Other than the lack of compatibility with ECS and AA, it was superior to AAA. (We had decided to scrap AAA in favour of Hombre.)

Vidar: Many people are sceptical about custom chip sets, because they say off-the-shelf stuff is faster, easier to upgrade and cheaper. What are your views on this issue?

Dr. Hepler: It depends a lot on what the overall strategy is. You have to remember that all chips are custom chips, whether designed by "a big company" or a little company. I think that a lot of the scepticism is due to a lack of knowledge of how chips are designed. With the new synthesizers, etc., it is not nearly as difficult as it was even 5 years ago. Since I make my living doing these kinds of designs, I'm all for them.

Vidar: Is it possible to upgrade the Hombre, without designing a completely new chip?

Dr. Hepler: I had a specific set of products in mind for the Hombre. I would have to discuss product strategy before answering this sort of question.

Vidar: It seems like the rest of the computer world are moving towards programmable VLIW chips etc. What do you think about these, and would it be possible to integrate a chip like this into the Hombre to boost performance?

Dr. Hepler: Hombre had an integer PA-RISC core on board to act as the system processor in the low-end mode or as a peripheral processor in the high-end mode. I added a few instructions to it to help in graphics and 3D processing, much like the MMX instructions that Intel has added to the Pentium.

The VLIW work (like that of the MultiFlow) that I am aware of is still well off into the future at the chip level. I think that it would be premature to try to put something like that into Hombre. It probably would not fit into the cost window.

Vidar: What was the target price for the Hombre?

Dr. Hepler: I was targeting \$45 (USD) for the two chips (total). This would have been our cost to produce.

Vidar: Would the PCI bus' bandwidth be a problem if it was put on a PCI card?

Dr. Hepler: No. The reason for this is that Hombre had its own processor and its own memory. The only thing passing through the PCI interface would have been commands or source data. All graphics fetches would have been from local memory. Most rendering would have also been from local memory.

Vidar: If Gateway 2000 asked you to finish the Hombre and provided enough resources, would you be interested?

Dr. Hepler: I have tried to contact them, but have been unsuccessful in getting to talk with anyone. I now have my own company and have done some multi-media design work that they may be interested in licensing. I would also be interested in doing some contract work in system or VLSI architecture.

Vidar: Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions!

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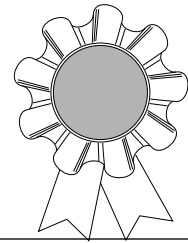
Obtained via The Lair

(<http://www.amigaworld.com/thelair/>) 

The Top Fifteen

Non-Commercial Software Titles I Cannot Live Without

By Johnny C. Kitchens



The titles I am about to list here have made a useful or noticeable change or improvement to my system. Some of these are free — some need a small fee paid to get full benefit. If you have yet to try one or all, give them a shot. Then you can see why I like them.

1. MCP — Master Control Program offers so many things in one package, it is hard not to find something useful in it. I remember when I first got my Amiga, I began getting little programs that offered improvements to various ways the Amiga worked. Over the years I had collected quite a few of those. When MCP came along it replaced many of those. As it grew, it replaced more and more, 'til it has just about replaced all of them. Do not make the mistake of installing this and turning everything on. Try the different features out. Some may not work for you. I was attracted to it when I saw it moving full windows around on the screen.

2. MagicMenu — This gives the Amiga the best looking menus you can see anywhere! It adds functionality to the menus. Best of all, you can adjust it to your own desire.

3. Power Snap — When I first saw Power Snap, I thought "That is nice, but is it needed?" I was told once you use it, you cannot live without it. I installed it, but I did not use it. Then I tried it. Today I doubt if there is a single time that my computer is on that I do not use it. I have turned several people over to it, and they say the same thing. What it does is allow you to take text from one place and put it easily somewhere else. Get it, try it, and you will use it.

4. SwazInfo — When I first saw this, I still was not sure what it did for me. It was easy to install and easy to uninstall... I figured I would try it. When I did an information on an icon, I got a whole new interface. All the protection bits are there, I can set icon type, stack size, view the alternate icon, set the comment, and much more.

5. MUI — Magic User Interface came to me by accident. I looked it over and misread what I thought it was supposed to do. Excited, I sent in my money to get a full working version. When I discovered it could not do what I wanted, I put it away and forgot about it. Then I got a piece of software that needed it. Practically every time I turn around there is something new requiring it. MUI has simplified creating interfaces for programmers and they are using it. Class Act is very similar in what it does to MUI, so I am including it here as well. A small war over which is better has erupted, but having both is almost a necessity.

6. Tools Daemon — This one gives you full use of the menubar, from the middle to the far right. Without it, that section of the menubar is just wasted space. You can add what you want to the menubar. That says it all.

7. MFR — Magic File Requester gives you the most powerful and complete file requester you can have. The only thing negative about it is that it has not been updated in a long time. Still, it is a part of my system and I use it.

8. File Archivers — Any file you download today is compressed with an archiver. Amiga files come in two forms today, Lha and LZX. Lha dominates the internet, while LZX has become our club's official format. Another one to consider is Zip. The PC world has settled on Zip and having it will give you access to those files.

9. MWB — Magic Workbench is a way to give your Workbench a whole new look. Through the careful use of colors MWB helps achieve a more pleasing and 3D looking GUI. It really looks good!

10. Miami — Miami is a new addition to my system. It changes the way the Amiga gets on the Internet from extremely hard to sheer simplicity.

11. Stonecracker — Over the years there have been several file compressors for the Amiga. They were very important because we used floppies to run our systems, and needed to get the most out of the disk. Hard drives may have eliminated that need for some users, but I saw that compressing the files was still useful... loads faster and saves wear and tear on the drive. PowerPacker and Imploder are two other file compressors that I have used. Stonecracker makes smaller files than either and they decompress faster.

12. ReOrg — This is the ultimate disk optimizer. Prior to ReOrg, optimizers were a little dangerous to use. They took forever, and worse they could crash during use. This made backing up a necessity before use. So far ReOrg has never crashed, and it is fast! I use it regularly to keep my disk working at a peak of performance.

13. KingCON — This is the ultimate upgrade for your Shell. This does so many things to your Shell, you will probably forget most of them. Those that you remember will make it a worthwhile addition. I recently saw that it was the most requested upgrade to be included in a new Workbench from Amiga International. If you use the Shell, get it.

14. Play16 — Play16 is the sound player for everything! It supports AHI, which is quickly becoming the new Amiga sound standard.

15. ARQ — This little program finishes the requester that pops up to tell you what is going on. It adds a little animation that gives the requester that extra bit of fun. Even better, it adds sound to the requester. You can attach any sound you want to any requester. What can I say, the Amiga can do it.

These are not listed in any particular order, and there are more that I use. These are the best of the best. AGM

Welcome

Welcome To The User Group Network A Message From Darreck Lisle, Amiga, Inc.

A miga, Inc. is pleased to have a direct link to the people that have kept the Amiga alive all of these years. Thanks to people like you the Amiga is still an out-standing system.

My definition of Amiga:

1. A vision or idea
2. A group of dedicated users that have bonded together to keep their ideas and creativity alive.
3. A group of people that have refused to settle for the mainstream, rebelling against the status quo. Normality is not a right — it is a choice.

This is what has kept us alive through these dark times. Now that the User Group Network has surfaced and enrollment is growing daily, the Amiga community has become that much stronger. The future does look bright and morale is high.

I am in the process of working with Wayne Hunt and the UGN Team to create an avenue for Developers, Distributors, and Retailers to reach as many Amiga Users as possible. Just because someone does not have an Internet connection, or subscribe to Amiga Magazines does not mean that they should be left in the dark.

Amiga, Inc. supports the magazines and we thank each and every one of them. Subscription levels are low these days and a lot of good information is being missed monthly.

Support the Amiga by supporting the folks that have stuck with us for so long:

- Amiga Developers
- Amiga Distributors
- Amiga Magazines
- Amiga Dealers

With the help of people like you, Amiga, Inc. has been busy supporting events, and promoting the Amiga.

Showcase Cinemas held an Amiga Display for the opening of the new James Bond movie, Tomorrow Never Dies.

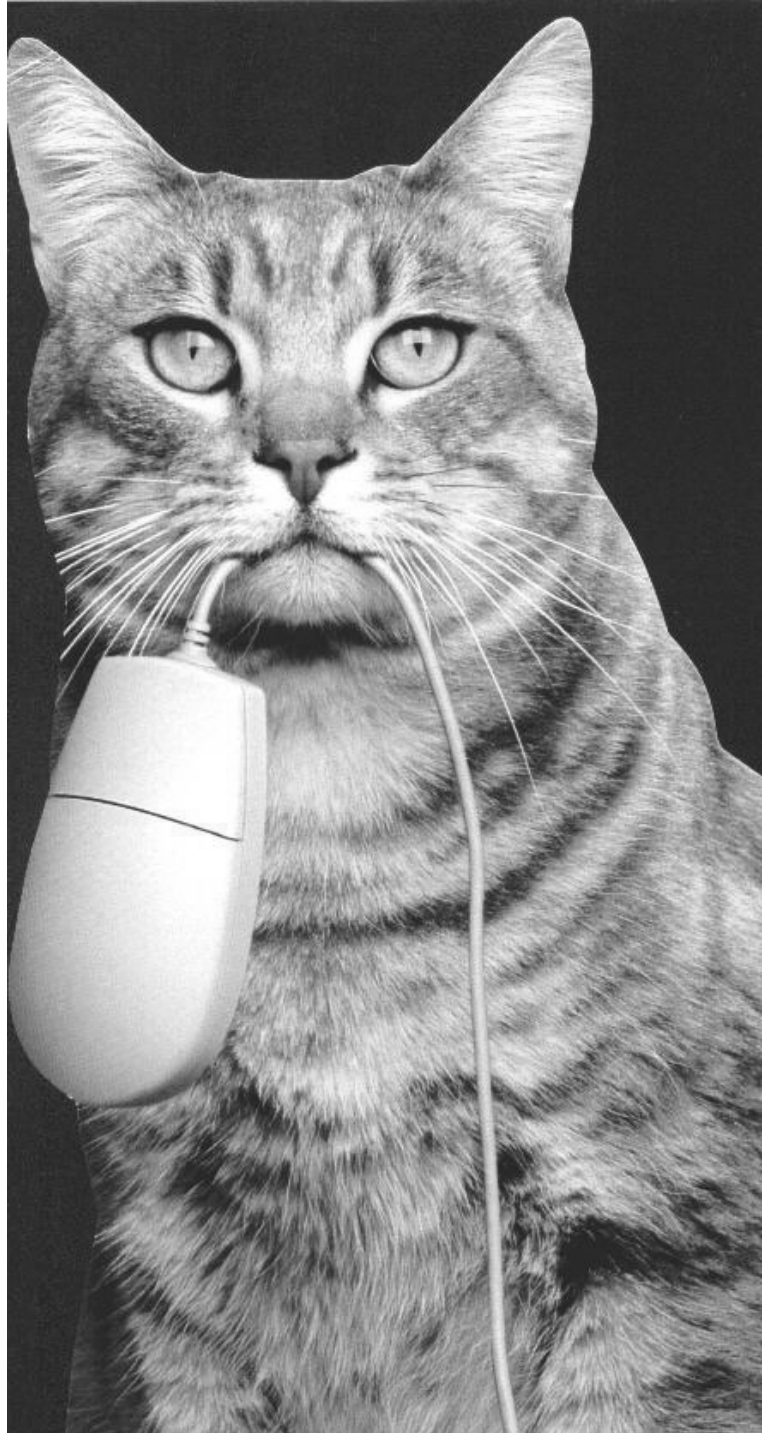
The movie Titanic used the Amiga extensively in production.

I receive many reports of Amiga's being used in all sorts of areas daily. A deal has been worked out with the Magazine Editors. Due to my lack of time, I cannot follow-up all of these leads. I will pass all leads to them and they can follow up and report on them. I have always wondered who was using our beloved

machine and how they were using it. Look out for these glimpses into the Amiga.

Thank you again for your patronage and I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming shows.

...Darreck Lisle, Events Coordinator, Amiga, Inc. AGM



Quake

The Official Announcement From clickBOOM

On January 5, 1998 PXL computers [<http://www.pxlcomputers.com/>] and clickBOOM [<http://www.clickboom.com/>] revolutionize the Amiga games market yet one more time — Quake Amiga is announced. The Original Quake was written for PC by id software.

"Quake is the biggest, baddest bloodiest and most atmospheric 3D action game ever conceived"
— PC Gamer

"The most important PC game ever"
— PC Zone

"Quake looks like no other game and perfectly displays id's trademark fusion of nightmarish art and advanced technology"
— Wired

"The new, radically different graphics engine delivers mesmerizing 3D effects"
— Time

Quake contains the most advanced 3D engine in the world. Moreover, players can connect to any one of several hundred Internet servers from around the world and join fast and furious battles against other users. Not only does Quake give the unbelievable amount of gameplay with its built-in options, it also features the most flexible core ever seen in a video game. This allows Quake users to create Quake "add-ons" (also known as "packs"). Quake add-ons can range from simple new levels and weapons to Quake movies and demos, to "total conversions" that change the way Quake is being played.

Total conversions allow Quake players to take control of James Bond in the MGM's official Tomorrow Never Dies; embark on a dangerous snake expedition in Sony's Anaconda; drive popular race cars in QuakeRally; control fighter bombers, tanks, helicopters, hovercrafts and other military vehicles in AirQuake; and much, much more.

All of the above options and more are now available on the Amiga. Quake is the first game to allow Amiga users to join the Internet gaming community. Connect to any Quake site and play against any combination of Amiga, PC or Mac users! Plus, Quake Amiga will use ANY Quake add-on, from freeware to commercial ones! And for those who like one-on-one deathmatches, connect to any Amiga, PC or Mac (modem, cable or network) and gib! No sacrifices — your copy of Quake is identical in options and expandability to PC or Mac.

Naturally, in order to make it more Amiga-like, Quake also contains full locale support, Amiga-style menus, ARexx, the option to play it in a window on any public screen, and much more. The complete list and explanation of each option is impressive, and can be accessed from the clickBOOM web site (<http://clickboom.com>).

Various tournaments, competitions, and clans will be organized in the near future for Amiga Quakers by clickBOOM and various Amiga magazines. ANY Amiga player will be able to join as long as he is a REGISTERED user of Quake. A registered user is a person who buys Amiga Quake, fills out the registration card, and mails it back to clickBOOM.

At the moment, Quake has entered its final beta testing stage. After it is fully tested by clickBOOM it will be sent to Id software for their approval, and then to CD duplication and packaging. If all goes according to plan, Quake should be ready on Feb. 1.

Minimum Amiga required to play Quake is 68020 with FPU, 8Mb of RAM, CD-ROM and 30Mb hard drive.

Recommended configuration is 68060, 16Mb RAM, Internet connection.

For more information about Quake please visit <http://www.clickboom.com/>.

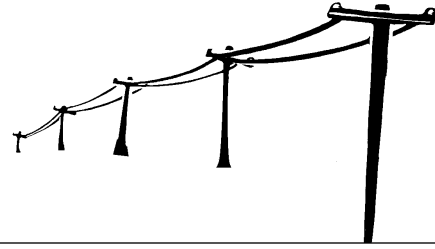
Quake is a trademark of Id software. (C)1996, 1997 Id software, inc. All rights reserved. Amiga conversion (C)1998 PXL computers and clickBOOM. AGM

Thought For The Month

*A fractal is by definition a set for which the Hausdorff Besicovitch dimension strictly exceeds the topological dimension.
...Mandelbrot, "The Fractal Geometry of Nature"*

BBS News

*The Best of The BBS Uploads
Selected by Bill Raecke*



The Amiga has been in need of a good database program for some time now. We used to have SuperBase, but it hasn't been updated in over four years and, by today's standards, the interface is woefully inadequate. SoftLogik and Softwood both offer simple database programs, but neither of those supports relational database concepts, which leaves them out of the running as serious programs. Well, Fiasco (FIASCO.MAIN.LZX and FIASCO_DOC_ENG.LZX) may be the beginnings of an answer. The system has a modern MUI interface and supports relationships. The creation of a database involves not only the definition of the data that the database will hold, but a definition of the GUI as well. The interface is as flexible as you would expect a well-written MUI program to be. It also has an extensive ARexx interface which makes all kinds customized updating and reporting possible. I don't claim to be an expert yet, but I was impressed enough to send in my shareware registration. At \$25, it's a bargain.

There is now a patch to upgrade AWeb to version 3.1. (AWEB31PCH.LZX) I have never considered AWeb to be the frontrunner in web browsers, but I may soon have to change my opinion. This release makes AWeb the first Amiga browser to support Javascript, something IBrowse has been promising for some time now but has yet to deliver. Note: This patch will only work on the registered version of AWeb. There is no demo version available at this time, although that will probably be corrected by the time you receive this newsletter.

Doom is now available for the Amiga. And it's free for the download. The authors of Doom have released the source code into the public domain and several people have taken on the job of compiling it for the Amiga. The one I'm recommending at this time is called DoomAttack (DOOMATTACK.LZX). Georg Steger has rewritten some of the code in assembler. That makes it faster than the others. It is so fast that it can run well even on a 68030 based Amiga. Check it out. Doom is more fun than I expected it to be.

As usual, there are a lot of datatype updates this month. Look for datatypes to handle:

Mac Pictures (MACPICT2_DTC40.0.LZX),
JPEG pics (AKJFIF43135.LZX),
lossless JPEG pics (AKLJPG43135.LZX),
and PNG pics (AKPNG43135.LZX).

I've been using Directory Opus 4.x as my directory utility for years now. It does everything I need it to do. And anything that it doesn't do for me, I can quickly make it do by using its ARexx port. But, like Superbase, its GUI has fallen behind the times. Of course there is always DOpus 5.x, but I have found that to be a bit overblown

with its Workbench look and feel and its unlimited directory windows. It's just not as simple to use as 4.x. (Don't shoot me, I'm just giving my personal opinion.) So, along comes RO (RO_V126.LZX) by Oliver Rummeyer. RO is a directory utility quite similar in capabilities to DOpus 4.x. It has just the two directory windows (the way nature intended) and has a very extensive ARexx interface. Of course, all the standard functions are built in. As with DOpus, the buttons and menus are configurable by the user. But what makes RO stand out is that it does all this a modern MUI based interface. It looks the way a program running on the Amiga in 1998 should look. The demo version is fully functional, except that you can't save any modifications to the standard configuration with the preferences program. Registration is just \$20. AGM



Late Breaking News

Hot News Off The Net

Collected by Bill Raecke

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (January 22, 1998) — Netscape Communications Corporation (NASDAQ: NSCP) today announced bold plans to make the source code for the next generation of its highly popular Netscape Communicator client software available for free licensing on the Internet. The company plans to post the source code beginning with the first Netscape Communicator 5.0 developer release, expected by the end of the first quarter of 1998. This aggressive move will enable Netscape to harness the creative power of thousands of programmers on the Internet by incorporating their best enhancements into future versions of Netscape's software. This strategy is designed to accelerate development and free distribution by Netscape of future high-quality versions of Netscape Communicator to business customers and individuals, further seeding the market for Netscape's enterprise solutions and Netcenter business.

HAAGE & PARTNER Computer — The advanced fax & answer machine & mini bbs, STFax 3.0 Professional.

STFax Professional is a new commercial fax program for the Amiga containing the sort of advanced features you would find within commercial PC fax software. STFax has been in the shareware for the last few months, and the brand new commercial professional version offers even more advanced features plus voice control for voice modems — use your Amiga as a digital answer machine, create a fax on demand service (ideal for small businesses. Allows your customers to contact you at any time and use fax on demand to remotely download facsimile information about your products!) and create advanced voice control scripts. You could even set up your own voice answering service as you find when phoning large companies such as British Airways: press 1 on your telephone to be put through to an operator, press 2 to... etc.

Why not create your own mini-BBS? Point and click BBS setup allows you to create multiple doors (with or without secure access), custom ASCII menus and greeting messages. Allow your user to download files within a door, upload files and even send you messages via the BBS. Ideal for the small/home business, family or other.

Full Fax Features:

- Support for all fax/modem classes (1, 2, 2.0)
- Phonebook (store all your favourite fax and telephone

numbers)

- Scheduler (store fax messages to be sent at specified times)
- Reports (quickly see when a fax was sent and received)
- Datatypes support for image conversion
- Printer driver to redirect all print-outs to a fax file (print from Wordworth, Pagestream etc!)
- Viewer for viewing outgoing/incoming fax messages
- Fax forward (forward faxes to another machine)

Advanced Voice Features:

- Use your Amiga as an answer machine (digital messages, unlimited storage space!)
- Advanced voice scripting — create your own voice network or fax on demand service
- Use your modem as a telephone (make and receive calls via STFax Pro and your modem)
- Remote access (listen to your messages from an external source. i.e. from another country!)
- Caller-ID (see exactly who has called and left you a message)

Your Own Mini-BBS:

- One or more secure doors (access areas)
- Point and click setup
- Allow users to upload files and send messages
- Custom greetings and menus

Price: 98 DM (approx. 59 US\$)

STFax is a product of Active Technologies and Simone Tellini. It is distributed by Active Technologies and Haage & Partner (world-wide). AGM



Meeting Notes



Amiga By-The-Loop Meeting Johnny C. Kitchens

December had the usual for most people. Holidays, buying gifts, travel, and seeing family members. It did not bring us anything new, such as news on the Amiga. A few software titles were announced, and the PowerPC accelerators from Phase5 began to generate some news, but not as much as I expected.

Our December meeting has, over the years, evolved into a Christmas party. People bring food and Amigas and we get to enjoy both. We got to see previews of Genetic Species and Uropa 2. These titles, from Vulcan, represent some of the most up-to-date game titles for the Amiga yet, though they are inspired by previous software. Genetic Species gives the Amiga its very own version of Doom. Though the demo is a bit hard to play, it sure looks good! Uropa 2 gives you a robot to go about and find things and kill the bad guys. Simple description, yes, but once again it sure looks good.

While about half of us are looking at the demo, the other half were working on a new member's machine, getting it up and running correctly. They needed the modem and scanner they brought along up and running. After a while we were all over there working on it. They were happy when it was finished, and the rest of us felt a sense of accomplishment. Generally, a very satisfying meeting!

I entered into the new year with more hope than ever that something would be said on the future of the Amiga. There are many signs of how well things are for the Amiga, and how well the users support the Amiga. A new web-browser, called Opera, announced that it was supporting non-Windows computers. At first, no mention of the Amiga was made. Someone talked them into including it. They asked for interested parties to visit their website and leave a message. The next day they made an announcement that their guest book was overflowing with "Amiga Forever" messages!

AWeb-II 3.1 came out and announced it was the first with support for JavaScript. I took a look at AWeb-II 3.1 and compared it to IBrowse 1.12a, using a very complex website. I had noticed that IBrowse gave a very empty look to the upper half of the page. I figured I was missing something, but not this much. AWeb showed lots of stuff

was missing. To say that it was impressive would be an understatement. IBrowse has not done a thing since July, nor has there been any news on it. AWeb has taken the lead. Now if they would just offer a more standardized interface.

Doom showed up for the Amiga this month! When this game came out for the PC, several experts assured me that it could never be done on the Amiga. How many times have I heard statements like that used in reference to computers. Impossible and never should be banned from computer conversations. Quake has now been announced for the Amiga, from the people who brought us Myst... another PC supgame.

Our January meeting started off with an introduction to our new chapter president, Ned Kelly. Ned has carried many of our club titles over the years, and has handled each one with enthusiasm. We kicked off our meeting with a discussion about the new webbrowser I mentioned previously, Opera. This led to talk on Java, and all the work that is supposed to be taking place. Java was supposed to be out by the end of summer 97. Some talk on Workbench 3.5 came up. When, was the main question. News of IBM about to show off a 1100MHz PowerPC generated some excitement. Someone asked if there were a limit to the number of directories you could have. The prevailing answer was no. Talk on removable media carried us along for a while. Zip, Jaz, SyJet, SparQ, LS-120, and few others were all discussed. Another long discussion of webpage setup, kept us going for a while.

Probably our most exciting discussion was on Siamese and their new all-in-one unit. This puts the Amiga motherboard and a PC motherboard in one case and they work together as a unit. The Amiga gets to use the PC hardware for its own use. The new Boxer motherboard would make a good starting point. [Editor's Note: This turned out to be a case of advertising that gave an impression that simply wasn't true. What is currently being advertised as a "Siamese PC" does NOT put both motherboards in the same box — the Amiga remains external — and the Amiga isn't included. To make things even worse, it's being advertised by a British company, and they won't ship to the U.S. Be on the lookout for a REAL Siamese system to be announced this month by an American manufacturer. This one WILL put both systems — PC and Amiga — in the same box. They will share the same monitor, keyboard and mouse and, in fact, will share the same workspace (Workbench). You heard it here first!]

Our main presentation was to take a look at a modem problem our new President was experiencing. WAS experiencing, as the problem never showed at the meeting. Bad phone lines? He will find out for sure now. At least he knows the modem is OK! Next month we will have a presentation on flatbed scanners and setting up websites, with David Campbell giving the presentation.

The MCCC

Statement of Purpose: The Metroplex Commodore Computer Club is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the collection and dissemination of computer knowledge, to the encouragement of computer education, and to the use of Amiga (formally Commodore) computers in the home, at school, and in business.

Legal Stuff: The MCCC is not connected with Gateway 2000 or Amiga International. The Amiga product name is a registered trademark of Gateway 2000.

Meetings and Membership: Our meetings are open to all. Family membership dues are \$24 per year or \$15 for six months and entitle the member to a mailed copy of the newsletter and free access to the club's extensive public domain and shareware software library. An additional \$12 annual fee provides access to the MCCC multi-user Bulletin Board System.

AGM Journal

Copyright Information: Material printed in the AGM Journal is not copyrighted unless so noted. Articles may be reprinted or otherwise distributed by other groups or individuals who may find them helpful as long as proper credit is given to the author and to the AGM.

Advertising: The AGM Journal accepts two kinds of advertising. Member ads are those which are submitted by a member and which are not of a commercial nature. There is no charge for member ads. Commercial ads are those which advertise multiple like items for sale. Rates for camera-ready commercial ads are as follows for a single month or (prepaid consecutive three months): Full Page — \$36 (\$96); Half Page — \$18 (\$48); Quarter Page — \$12 (\$32); Business Card — \$6 (\$16).

Articles: Members are encouraged to submit articles. Articles may be submitted in virtually any Amiga-generated format. They may be uploaded to the MCCC BBS or sent via e-mail to wraecke@arlington.net, or submitted on disk.

Deadline: The deadline for submissions to the AGM Journal is 7am of the fourth Saturday of each month. Payment must accompany all ad copy. Make checks payable to MCCC and mail c/o Bill Raecke, 2614 Charolais Way, Arlington, Texas 76017.

Extra Copies: Extra Copies of the MCCC News are available at \$1 per copy. Orders should be forwarded with the required fee by the newsletter deadline.

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BBS Numbers

Metro.....	28,800 BAUD.....	817-268-4191
Local.....	28,800 BAUD.....	817-280-9900

Web Site

<http://www.startext.net/np/agm/>

Calendar Of Events

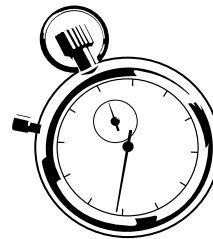
- Feb 3 MCCC Board of Directors Meeting
7:30 pm — Okley Moss' place
1049 Keith Drive, Hurst
- Feb 10 Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm
Bell Helicopter Training Facility
Trinity at Norwood, Hurst
- Feb 19 Amiga North Dallas Chapter
7:30 pm
SMU Building
Collins Blvd. & International Parkway
Richardson
(Park in ALECATEL employee parking
across parkway)
- Feb 28 March Newsletter
Deadline

Membership Watch

Memberships Expired in January

Gus Reiter

John Shuford



Memberships Expiring in February

Ken Doll
Bill Scott

Douglas Gaudin
Rodney Wood

The AGM Journal

MCCC

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Note Membership Expiration on Label